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ABSTRACT

Asking the question "What Is Poetry?" these essays seek out the art of true poetry--differentiating between facile novelty and genuine originality; asserting the poet's ability to question and lay bare reality; and demonstrating the subtle power of language in the "fruitful ambiguities" of its most ordinary parts, such as the preposition "of." Surveying an extraordinary range of poets, many of the 23 essays have been published elsewhere, but several are new to this collection. The essays are organized into three parts: "Poetic Substances" explores the nature of poetry and the poet, with essays that cover the poet "being-and-feeling-at-home" in his or her work and the parallels between dreams and poetry. Next, "Poetic Experiences" examines the relationship between the poems and the individual, whether a poet or a reader of poetry. The final part, "The Work of Poets," deals with the poets themselves, reading with insight the works of Walt Whitman, Robert Penn Warren, Elizabeth Bishop, May Swenson, and others. In the essays, the enduring force of poetry is championed against the incursion of fashionable writing and aim is taken against the college and university literature and writing programs that offer only "little blobs of condensed contextualization," scarcely touching poetry's legacy. (NKA)

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